

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 981

By Yager

A RESOLUTION to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the heroic actions of Sergeant Alvin C. York.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the Volunteer State is especially proud to be the home of so many valiant men and women who have performed above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, while the heroic deeds of Tennesseans have been extolled throughout the history of our State and nation, the distinguished military service of every proud Tennessean should be illuminated, shared, and properly honored but perhaps none more so than the heroic actions of the legendary Sergeant Alvin C. York of Fentress County; and

WHEREAS, Alvin York was drafted into the United States Army and was assigned to Company G, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Infantry Division at Camp Gordon, Georgia. He served with his Division in the St. Mihiel Offensive; and

WHEREAS, during an attack (Meuse-Argonne) by his battalion to capture German positions near Hill 223 along the Decauville rail-line north of Chatel-Chéhéry, France, on October 8, 1918, Alvin York's actions earned him the Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, under the command of Sergeant Bernard Early, four non-commissioned officers, including recently promoted Corporal Alvin C. York, and thirteen privates were ordered to infiltrate the German lines to take out the machine guns. The group worked their way behind the Germans and overran the headquarters of a German unit, capturing a large group of German soldiers who were preparing a counter-attack against the U.S. troops; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Early's men were contending with the prisoners when machine gun fire suddenly peppered the area, killing six Americans and wounding three others. The fire came from German machine guns on the ridge; and

WHEREAS, the loss of the nine men put Corporal York in charge of the seven remaining U.S. soldiers. As his men remained under cover, guarding the prisoners, Alvin York worked his way into position to silence the German machine guns; and

WHEREAS, during the assault, six German soldiers in a trench near Corporal York charged him with fixed bayonets. Corporal York had fired all the rounds in his M1917 Enfield rifle but drew his M1911 semi-automatic pistol and shot all six soldiers before they could reach him; and

WHEREAS, German First Lieutenant Paul Jürgen Vollmer, commander of the First Battalion, 120th Landwehr Infantry, emptied his pistol trying to kill Corporal York while he was contending with the machine guns. Failing to injure Corporal York and seeing his mounting losses, Vollmer offered in English to surrender the unit to Corporal York, who accepted; and

WHEREAS, at the end of the engagement, Alvin C. York and his seven men marched 132 German prisoners back to the American lines. Upon returning to his unit, Corporal York reported to his brigade commander, Brigadier General Julian Robert Lindsey, who remarked, "Well York, I hear you have captured the whole damn German army." Corporal York replied, "No sir. I got only 132"; and

WHEREAS, Alvin C. York's actions silenced the German machine guns and enabled the 328th Infantry to renew its attack to capture the Decauville Railroad; and

WHEREAS, Alvin C. York was promptly promoted to Sergeant and received the Distinguished Service Cross. A few months later, an investigation by Sergeant York's chain of command resulted in an upgrade of his Distinguished Service Cross to the Medal of Honor, which was presented to him by the commanding general of the American Expeditionary Forces, General John J. Pershing. The French Republic awarded him the Croix de Guerre, the Medaille Militaire, and the Legion of Honour; and

WHEREAS, when decorating Sergeant York with the Croix de Guerre, Marshal Ferdinand Foch told him, "What you did was the greatest thing accomplished by any soldier of all the armies of Europe"; and

WHEREAS, in addition to his French medals, Italy awarded him the Croce al Merito di Guerra, and Montenegro decorated him with its War Medal. He eventually received nearly fifty decorations for his actions; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant York's Medal of Honor citation reads, "After his platoon suffered heavy casualties and three other non-commissioned officers had become casualties, Cpl. York assumed command. Fearlessly leading seven men, he charged with great daring a machine gun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat the machine gun nest was taken, together with four officers and 128 men and several guns"; and

WHEREAS, in attempting to explain his actions during the 1919 investigation that resulted in the Medal of Honor, Sergeant York told General Lindsey, "A higher power than man guided and watched over me and told me what to do"; and

WHEREAS, while no offering can properly relay our gratitude for his bravery and dedication to preserving the blessed freedom that is inseparable from our American heritage and ideals, it is most appropriate that we should honor the memory Sergeant Alvin C. York to the full extent of our ability, as he made untold and innumerable sacrifices to preserve the liberties we enjoy today; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we hereby honor and commemorate the 100th anniversary of the courageous actions of Sergeant Alvin C. York of Fentress County during World War I and pay respectful tribute to his memory as one of our nation's most heroic citizens.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.